

Juche

Juche (English: /ˈdʒuːtʃeɪ/ *JOO-chay*), officially the ***Juche idea*** (Korean: 주체사상; RR: *Juche sasang*) and also translated as ***Juche thought*** or ***Jucheism***, is the state *ideology* of *North Korea*, described by the country's government as "*Kim Il-sung's original, brilliant and revolutionary contribution to national and international thought*".^[1] It postulates that "man is the master of his destiny", that the masses are to act as the "masters of the revolution and construction", and that by becoming self-reliant and strong, a nation can achieve true *socialism*.^[2]

Kim Il-sung developed the ideology, which was originally viewed as a variant of *Marxism–Leninism* until it was declared a distinct ideology by his son and successor, *Kim Jong-il*. Consequently, the *North Korean government* adapted *Juche* into a set of principles used to justify its policy decisions: political independence (자주; *jaju*), economic self-sufficiency (자립; *jarip*), and military self-reliance (자위; *jawi*). *Juche* incorporates the *historical materialist* ideas of *Marxism–Leninism* but also strongly emphasizes the *individual*, the *nation state* and its *sovereignty*. As *Kim Jong-il* emerged as Kim's likely successor in the 1970s, loyalty to the leader was increasingly emphasized as an essential part of *Juche*, as expressed in the *Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System*.

Juche has been described by critics as *ultranationalist* and a deviation from *Marxism–Leninism*.

Contents
Etymology
History
Origin
Development
International outreach
Concepts
Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism
Socialism of Our Style
"Great Leader" theory
The "masses"
<i>Songun</i>
Juche in practice
Diplomacy

Juche



Torch symbolizing *Juche* at the top of the *Juche Tower* in *Pyongyang*

Korean name	
Chosŏn'gŭl	주체사상
Hancha	主體思想
Revised Romanization	<i>Juche sasang</i>
McCune–Reischauer	<i>Chuch'e sasang</i>
Literally " <i>subject idea</i> "	

Economics

Defense

Religious features of *Juche*

Presence of a sacred leader

Rituals

Familism

Analysis and criticism

See also

References

Citations

Sources

Books

Journal articles

Further reading

External links

Etymology

Juche comes from the Sino-Japanese word 主體 (modern spelling: 主体), whose Japanese reading is *shutai*. The word was coined in 1887 to translate the concept of *Subjekt* in German philosophy (subject, meaning "the entity perceiving or acting upon an object or environment") into Japanese. The word migrated to the Korean language at around the turn of the century and retained this meaning.^[3] *Shutai* went on to appear in Japanese translations of Karl Marx's writings.^[4] North Korean editions of Marx used the word *Juche* even before the word was attributed to Kim Il-sung in its supposedly novel meaning in 1955.^[5]

In contemporary political discourse on North Korea, *Juche* has a connotation of "self-reliance", "autonomy" and "independence".^{[6][7][8]} It is often defined in opposition to the Korean concept of *Sadae*, or reliance on the great powers.^[9] South Koreans use the word without reference to the North Korean ideology.^[10]

The North Korean government officially refers to the ideology as *Juche sasang* (주체사상) in Korean and the *Juche* idea in English. *Juche sasang* literally means "subject idea"^[11] and has also been translated as *Juche thought*^[12] or Jucheism.^[13] Adherents of *Juche* are sometimes referred to as "Jucheists".^[14]

History

Origin

Official statements by the North Korean government attribute the origin of *Juche* to Kim Il-sung's experiences in the Anti-Imperialist Youth League in 1930 in his liberation struggle against Japan.^{[2][15]} The first documented reference to *Juche* as an ideology appeared in 1955 in a speech given by Kim Il-sung entitled "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing *Juche* in Ideological Work". The speech had been delivered to promote a political purge similar to the earlier Yan'an Rectification Movement in China.^[16]

Hwang Jang-yop, scholar and Kim's top adviser on ideology, discovered Kim's 1955 speech in the late 1950s when Kim, having established a cult of personality,^[17] sought to develop his own version of Marxism–Leninism.^{[18][19]}

Development

In his 1955 speech, the first known to refer to *Juche*, Kim Il-sung said:

To make revolution in Korea we must know Korean history and geography as well as the customs of the Korean people. Only then is it possible to educate our people in a way that suits them and to inspire in them an ardent love for their native place and their motherland.^[20]

In the 1965 speech "On Socialist Construction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the South Korean Revolution" given on 14 April 1965, Kim Il-sung outlined the three fundamental principles of *Juche*:

1. Political independence (Korean: 자주; RR: *jaju*; MR: *chaju*)
2. Economic self-sufficiency (Korean: 자립; RR: *jarip*; MR: *charip*)
3. Military self-reliance (Korean: 자위; RR: *jawi*; MR: *chawi*)

On the Juche Idea, the main work on *Juche*, was published in North Korea in Kim Jong-il's name in 1982.^[21] In North Korea it functions as "the authoritative and comprehensive explanation of *Juche*".^[21] According to the treatise, the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) is responsible for educating the masses in the ways of *Juche* thinking.^[21] According to the treatise, *Juche* is inexorably linked with Kim Il-sung and it "represents the guiding idea of the Korean Revolution ... we are confronted with the honorable task of modeling the whole society on the *Juche* idea".^[21] Kim Jong-il states in the work that *Juche* is not a creative application of Marxism–Leninism, but rather "a new era in the development of human history"^[21] while criticizing the "communists and nationalists" of the 1920s for their elitist posture, claiming that they were "divorced from the masses".^[22] The WPK's break with basic premises of Marxism–Leninism emerges more clearly in the article "Let Us March Under the Banner of Marxism–Leninism and the *Juche* Idea".^[22]

In August 1997, the Central People's Committee of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea promulgated regulations regarding the use of the *Juche* calendar. Gregorian calendar dates are used for years before 1912 while years from 1912 (the year of Kim Il-sung's birth) are described as "*Juche* years". The Gregorian year 2022, for example, is "*Juche* 111" as $2022 - 1911 = 111$. When used, "*Juche* years" are often accompanied by the Gregorian equivalent, i.e. "*Juche* 111, 2022" or "*Juche* 111 (2022)".^[23]

International outreach

Kim believed that *Juche's* principles could be applied around the world, not just in Korea.^[24] Since 1976 North Korea has organized international seminars on *Juche*. The International Scientific Seminar on the *Juche* Idea took place in Antananarivo from 28 to 30 September 1976 under the sponsorship of the Democratic Republic of Madagascar. Many prominent party and government officials, public figures, representatives of revolutionary and progressive organizations, scientists and journalists from more than fifty countries attended. Malagasy President Didier Ratsiraka expressed strong sympathies and support for North Korea. An excerpt from the opening speech says:

Regardless of the opposition forces, the determination of the people and their strength and conviction are not measured by territorial dimensions, possession of advanced technology, still less, opulence or riches. For those who wish to forget the lesson of history so easily and so quickly, Algeria, Vietnam, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola – and closer to us – Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Azania are excellent examples which make them deeply reflect on. What we want is not the perfection of political independence alone. The evil forces craftily manipulate the economic levers in order to perpetuate their supremacy and reduce us to vassals and eternal mendicants.^[25]



Tribute plaques to *Juche* from foreign delegates, contained in the interior entrance of the Juche Tower

The North Korean government established the International Institute of the *Juche* Idea (initially the International *Juche* Research Centre) in Tokyo in 1978 in order to supervise the activities of international *Juche* research groups.^[26] The Juche Tower in Pyongyang, completed in 1982, incorporated commemorative plaques from supporters and *Juche* Study Groups from around the world.^[7] In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Black Panther Party of the United States expressed sympathy for the *Juche* ideology.^{[27][28]} In 2016, the Nepal Workers and Peasants Party identified *Juche* as the guiding idea in its governance of the city of Bhaktapur.^[29]

Concepts

Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism

Kimilsungism (김일성주의) and the Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System were formally introduced by Kim Jong-il in 1974.^[30] Kim Jong-il reportedly did so to strengthen his position within the Workers' Party of Korea, taking advantage of his father's political supremacy.^[30] Kimilsungism refers to the ideas of Kim Il-sung, while the Ten Principles serve as a guide for North Korean political and social life.^[30] Kim Jong-il argued that his father's ideas had evolved and they therefore deserved their own distinct name.^[31] North Korean state media had previously described Kim Il-sung's ideas as "contemporary Marxism–Leninism"; by calling them "Kimilsungism", Kim Jong-il sought to elevate the ideas of his father to the same level of prestige as Stalinism and Maoism.^[31] Not long after the introduction of "Kimilsungism" into the North Korean lexicon, Kim Jong-il began promoting the slogan "Kimilsungism-ization [*sic*] of the Whole Society" (온 사회의 김일성주의화).^[30]

Political analyst Lim Jae-cheon argues that there is no discernible difference between Kimilsungism and *Juche*, and that the two terms are interchangeable.^[30] However, in his 1976 speech "On Correctly Understanding the Originality of Kimilsungism", Kim Jong-il said that Kimilsungism comprises the "*Juche* idea and a far-reaching revolutionary theory and leadership method evolved from this idea".^[32] He further added that "Kimilsungism is an original idea that cannot be explained within the frameworks of Marxism–Leninism. The *Juche* idea, which constitutes the quintessence of Kimilsungism, is an idea newly discovered in the history of mankind".^[31] Kim Jong-il went further, stating that Marxism–Leninism had become obsolete and must be replaced by Kimilsungism.^[33]

The revolutionary theory of Kimilsungism is a revolutionary theory which has provided solutions to problems arising in the revolutionary practice in a new age different from the era that gave rise to Marxism–Leninism. On the basis of *Juche* idea, the leader gave a profound explanation of the theories, strategies and tactics of national liberation, class emancipation and human liberations in our era. Thus, it can be said that the revolutionary theory of Kimilsungism is a perfect revolutionary theory of Communism in the era of *Juche*.^[33]

According to analyst Shin Gi-wook, the ideas of *Juche* and Kimilsungism are in essence the "expressions of North Korean particularism over supposedly more universalistic Marxism–Leninism".^[33] In many ways, the new terminology signaled a move from socialism to nationalism.^[33] This was evident in a speech presented by Kim Jong-il in 1982, during celebrations of his father's 70th birthday, in which he stated that love for the nation came before love for socialism.^[34] This particularism gave birth to such concepts as "A Theory of the Korean Nation as Number One and Socialism of Our Style".^[35]

Following the death of Kim Jong-il in December 2011, Kimilsungism became **Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism** (김일성-김정일주의) at the 4th Conference of the Workers' Party of Korea in April 2012.^[36] As well as stating that the WPK was "the party of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il", the conference proclaimed Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism as "the only guiding idea of the party".^[36] In the 4th Conference's aftermath, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) stated that "the Korean people have long called the revolutionary policies ideas of the President [Kim Il-sung] and Kim Jong-il as Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism and recognized it as the guiding of the nation".^[37] Kim Jong-un, the WPK First Secretary, said:

Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism is an integral system of the idea, theory and method of *Juche* and a great revolutionary ideology representative of the *Juche* era. Guided by Kimilsungism–Kimjongilism, we should conduct Party building and Party activities, so as to sustain the revolutionary character of our Party and advance the revolution and construction in line with the ideas and intentions of the President and the General.^[38]

Socialism of Our Style

Socialism of Our Style, also referred to as Korean-style socialism and our-style socialism within North Korea, is an ideological concept Kim Jong-il introduced on 27 December 1990 in the speech "Socialism of Our Country is a Socialism of Our Style as Embodied by the *Juche* idea".^[35] Speaking after the Revolutions of 1989 that brought down the Eastern Bloc countries, Kim Jong-il explicitly stated that North Korea needed—and survived because of—Socialism of Our Style.^[35] He argued that socialism in Eastern Europe failed because they "imitated the Soviet experience in a mechanical manner".^[35] According to Kim, they failed to understand that the Soviet experience was based on specific historical and social circumstances and could not be used by other countries aside from the Soviet Union itself.^[35] He added that "if experience is considered absolute and accepted dogmatically it is impossible to build Socialism properly, as the times change and the specific situation of each country is different from another".^[35] Kim Jong-il went on to criticize "dogmatic application" of Marxism–Leninism, stating:^[39]

Marxism–Leninism presented a series of opinions on building of Socialism and Communism, but it confined itself to presupposition and hypothesis owing to the limitations of the conditions of their ages and practical experiences ... But many countries applied the principles of Marxist–Leninist materialistic conception of history dogmatically, failing to advance revolution continually after the establishment of the socialist system.^[39]

North Korea would not encounter such difficulties because of the conceiving of *Juche*.^[40] In his words, North Korea was "a backward, colonial semifeudal society" when the communists took over, but since the North Korean communists did not accept Marxism because it was based on European capitalist experiences, or Leninism, which was based on Russia's experience, they conceived of *Juche*.^[40] He believed the situation in North Korea was more complex because of the nearby American presence in South Korea.^[40] Thanks to Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il argued, the revolution had "put forward original lines and policies suited to our people's aspirations and the specific situation of our country".^[40] "The *Juche* idea is a revolutionary theory which occupies the highest stage of development of the revolutionary ideology of the working class", Kim Jong-il said, further stating that the originality and superiority of the *Juche* idea defined and strengthened Korean socialism.^[40] He then conceded by stating that Socialism of Our Style was "a man-centered Socialism", explicitly making a break with basic Marxist–Leninist thought, which argues that material forces are the driving force of historical progress, not people.^[40] Socialism of Our Style was presented as an organic sociopolitical theory, using the language of Marxism–Leninism, saying:^[41]

The political and ideological might of the motive force of revolution is nothing but the power of single-hearted unity between the leader, the Party, and the masses. In our socialist society, the leader, the Party, and the masses throw in their lot with one another, forming a single socio-political organism. The consolidation of blood relations between the leader, the Party and the masses is guaranteed by the single ideology and united leadership.^[41]

"Great Leader" theory

Unlike Marxism–Leninism, which considers developments in the material conditions of production and exchange as the driving force of historical progress (known as historical materialism), *Juche* considers human beings in general the driving force in history.^[42] It is summarized as "the popular masses are placed in the center of everything, and the leader is the center of the masses".^[42] *Juche*, North Korea maintains, is a "man-centered ideology" in which "man is the master of everything and decides everything".^[42] In contrast to Marxism–Leninism, in which a people's decisions are conditioned their relations to the means of production, *Juche* argues that people's decisions take consideration of, but are independent from, external factors.^[42] Just like Marxism–Leninism, *Juche* believes history is law-governed, but that it is only man who drives progress, stating that "the popular masses are the drivers of history".^[43] However, for the masses to be successful, they need a "Great Leader".^[43] Marxism–Leninism argues that the popular masses will lead (on the basis of their relation to production), but in North Korea the role of a Great Leader should be essential for leadership.^[44] This theory allegedly helped Kim Il-sung establish a unitary, one-man rule over North Korea.^[44]



North Koreans bowing to massive bronze statues of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il at the Mansu Hill Grand Monument in Pyongyang.

The theory turns the Great Leader into an absolutist, supreme leader.^[45] The working class is not to think for themselves, but instead to think through the Great Leader.^[45] The Great Leader is the "top brain" (i.e. "mastermind") of the working class, meaning that he is the only legitimate representative of the working class.^[45] Class struggle can be realized only through the Great Leader and difficult tasks in general and revolutionary changes in particular can be introduced only through and by the Great Leader.^[45] In historical development, it is the Great Leader who is the leading force of the working class.^[45] The Great Leader is also a flawless and incorruptible human being who never commits mistakes, who is always

benevolent and who always rules for the masses.^[46] For the Great Leader system to function, a unitary ideological system must be in place; the Ten Principles for a Monolithic Ideological System was thus introduced by Kim Jong-il for this purpose.^[47]

The "masses"

Unlike the Joseon dynasty, where there was a huge gap between the upper and lower classes, North Korea had adopted the concept of a gathered-together "people". Instead of a strict social hierarchy, North Korea had in theory divided the nation into three classes, namely peasant, worker and *samuwon* (intellectuals and professionals), where each was just as important as the other. The *samuwon* class consisted of clerks, small traders, bureaucrats, professors and writers. This was a unique class that was created to increase education and literacy of North Korea's population.

Normally, Marxist–Leninist states would value only the farmers or laborers, thus in the Soviet Union the intelligentsia was not defined as an independent class of its own, but rather as a "social stratum" that recruited itself from members of almost all classes: proletariat, petite bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. However, a "peasant intelligentsia" was never mentioned. Correspondingly, the "proletarian intelligentsia" was exalted for bringing forth progressive scientists and communist theoreticians whereas the "bourgeois intelligentsia" was condemned for producing "bourgeois ideology", which were all non-Marxist-Leninist worldviews. Language reforms followed revolutions more than once, such as the New Korean Orthography in North Korea (which failed due to Korean ethnic nationalist fears of precluding Korean unification), or the simplification of Chinese characters under Mao Zedong (a consequence of the divergent orthographic choices of Taiwan and the People's Republic of China), or the simplification of the Russian language after the 1917 revolution in Russia and consequent struggle against illiteracy, known in Soviet Russia as Likbez (*Likvidaciya Bezgramotnosti*, liquidation of illiteracy).

They believed in rapid industrialization through labor and in subjecting nature to human will. By restructuring social classes into a mass of people who are theoretically all equal, the North Korean government claimed it would be able to attain self-reliance or *Juche* in upcoming years. This is questionable, because the country suffers massive food shortages annually and is heavily dependent on foreign aid.^[48]

Songun

Songun (선군정치; lit. military-first politics) was first mentioned on 7 April 1997 in *Rodong Sinmun* under the headline "There Is a Victory for Socialism in the Guns and Bombs of the People's Army".^[49] It defined the military-centered thinking of the time by stating; "the revolutionary philosophy to safeguard our own style of socialism under any circumstances".^[49] The concept was credited to "Respected General Kim Jong-il".^[49] In a joint editorial on 16 June 1998 entitled "Our Party's Military-First Politics Will Inevitably Achieve Victory and Will Never Be Defeated" by Kulloja (the WPK theoretical magazine) and *Rodong Sinmun*, it was stated that *Songun* meant "the leadership method under the principle of giving priority to the military and resolving the problems that may occur in the course of revolution and construction as well as establishing the military as the main body of the revolution in the course of achieving the total tasks of socialism".^[50] While the article clearly referred to "our Party", this was not a reference to the WPK but rather to the personal leadership of Kim Jong-il.^[50] On 5 September 1998, the North Korean Constitution was revised and it made clear that the National Defence Commission, the highest military body, was the supreme body of the state.^[50] This date is considered the beginning of the *Songun* era.^[50]

Juche in practice

In the view of some observers, *Juche* is not mere rhetoric, but rather an ideal of self-reliance that North Korea has attempted to put into practice.^{[51][52][53]}

Diplomacy

Based on *On the Juche Idea*, Kim Jong-il argued: "Independence is not in conflict with internationalism but is the basis of its strengthening".^[54] He stated that North Korea co-operated with socialist countries, the "international communist movement" and "newly-emerging nations" on the basis of non-interference, equality and mutual benefit.^[55]

North Korea emerged from Soviet occupation and fought alongside the Chinese communists in the Chinese Civil War and the Korean War. However, it soon asserted its independence from both the Soviet Union and China. Though it rejected de-Stalinization, it avoided taking sides in the Sino-Soviet split. As the Communist Bloc split, introduced market reforms and collapsed, North Korea increasingly emphasized *Juche* in both theory and practice.^{[56][57][58]}

North Korea was admitted to the Non-Aligned Movement in 1975 and began to present itself as a leader of the Third World. It fostered diplomatic relations with developing countries and promoted *Juche* as a model for others to follow.^{[59][60]}

National survival has been seen as a guiding principle of North Korea's diplomatic strategy.^[61] Even in the midst of economic and political crises, North Korea continues to emphasize its independence on the world stage.^[62]

Economics

In *On the Juche Idea*, Kim Jong-il stated: "In order to implement the principle of economic self-sufficiency, one must build an independent national economy".^[55] More specifically, he stated, "Heavy industry with the machine-building industry as its backbone is the pillar of an independent national economy".^[63] He also emphasized the importance of technological independence^[64] and self-sufficiency in resources.^[65] However, he stated that this did not rule out international economic co-operation.^[65]

In 1956, Kim Il-sung declared *Juche* to be the guiding principle of the North Korean economy. After the devastation of the Korean War, North Korea began to rebuild its economy with a base in heavy industry, with the aim of becoming as self-sufficient as possible.^[66] As a result, North Korea developed what has been called the "most autarkic industrial economy in the world".^{[51][67]} North Korea received a lot of economic aid and technical assistance from the Soviet Union and China, but it did not join Comecon, the communist common market.^{[68][53]} In the 1990s, it had one of the world's lowest rates for dependence on petroleum, using hydroelectric power and coal instead of imported oil.^[69] Its textile industry uses vinylon, known as the "*Juche* fiber", which was invented by a Korean and which is made from locally available coal and limestone.^{[70][71]} The history of the development of vinylon often featured in propaganda that preached the virtues of technological self-reliance.^[67] North Korea had 10,000 CNC machines in 2010.^[72] The first domestic homemade CNC machine was introduced in 1995 and in 2017 it has around 15,000 machines.^[73]

Commentators have often pointed out the discrepancy between the principle of self-sufficiency and North Korea's dependence on foreign aid, especially during its economic crisis in the 1990s.^[74] The pursuit of economic autarky has been blamed for contributing to the crisis.^[75] On this view, attempts at self-sufficiency led to inefficiency and to the neglect of export opportunities in industries where there was a comparative advantage.^[76]

Defense

In *On the Juche Idea*, Kim Jong-il stated: "Self-reliance in defense is a fundamental principle of an independent sovereign state".^[77] He stated that it was possible to get aid from friends and allies, but that this would be effective only if the state was militarily strong in its own right.^[78] He advocated a state where "all the people are under arms and the whole country becomes a fortress".^[79] He also advocated the development of a local defense industry to avoid dependence on foreign arms suppliers.^[80]

North Korea has attempted to put Kim Il-sung's ideas into practice.^[81] The Korean People's Army is one of the largest on earth. It has developed its own nuclear missile.^{[82][83]} It produces UDMH fuel for liquid fueled missiles^[84] and Tumansky RD-9 Turbojet engines, which power Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-19 and Shenyang J-6.^[85] CNC machines are used for production of missiles and centrifuges.^[73] North Korea's propaganda since the Korean War has contrasted its military autonomy with the presence of American forces in the South.^[67]

Religious features of *Juche*

Some South Korean scholars categorize *Juche* as a national religion or compare its facets to those of some religions. For instance, *Juche* has been compared to pre-existing religions in Korea (notably neo-Confucianism and Korean shamanism) due to their shared familiar principles.^[86] While the influence of traditional East Asian religions on *Juche* is widely disputed, the ideology has been thought of by several academic studies as having aspects of a national and indigenous religious movement in addition to being a political philosophy due to the following features: the presence of a sacred leader, rituals, and familism.^[87] Despite the religious features of *Juche*, it is a highly atheistic ideology that discourages the practice of mainstream religions. This draws from *Juche's* Marxist–Leninist origins. North Korea is officially an atheist state (although the native religion Cheondoism is tolerated and even maintains a political party), but some argue that it maintains a cult of personality identical to a religion.^{[88][89]}

Presence of a sacred leader

The ideology teaches that the role of a Great Leader is essential for the popular masses to succeed in their revolutionary movement because without leadership they are unable to survive.^[90] This is the foundation of the personality cult directed at Kim Il-sung. The personality cult explains how the *Juche* ideology has been able to endure until today, even during the North Korean government's undeniable dependence on foreign assistance during its famine in the 1990s.^[87] The concept of a "sacred leader" in *Juche* as well as the cult around the Kim family has been compared to the State Shinto ideology of Imperial Japan in which the Emperor was seen as a divine being.^[91]

Through the fundamental belief in the essential role of the Great Leader, the former North Korean leader Kim Il-sung has become the "supreme deity for the people" and the *Juche* doctrine is reinforced in North Korea's constitution as the country's guiding principle.^[92] The parallel relationship structure between Kim Il-sung and his people to religious founders or leaders and their followers has led many scholars to consider *Juche* a religious movement as much as a political ideology.^[86] However, those familiar with cults would again posit that *Juche* bypasses the tenets of religion completely and instead meets the criteria of a totalitarian cult.^[93]

Juche's emphasis on the political and sacred role of the leader and the ensuing worshipping by the popular masses has been critiqued by various Western Marxist intellectuals.^[90] They argue that the North Korean working class or the proletariat has been stripped of their honor and therefore call the cult of personality non-Marxist and non-democratic.^[94]

Rituals

The religious behavior of *Juche* can also be seen in the perspectives of the North Korean people through refugee interviews from former participants in North Korea's ritual occasions. One pertinent example is the Arirang Festival, which is a gymnastics and artistic festival held in the Rungnado May Day Stadium in Pyongyang. All components of the festival, from the selection of performers, mobilization of resources, recruitment of the audience and publicity for the show have been compared to facets of a national religious event.^[95]

The Arirang Festival has been described to demonstrate the power of the North Korean government to arrange a form of religious gathering. It has done so by "appropriating a mass of bodies for calisthenic and performative arts representing the leader as the Father and his faithful followers".^[96] The Festival's effectiveness in transforming its participants into loyal disciples of *Juche* seems to originate from the collectivist principle of "one for all and all for one" and the ensuing emotional bond and loyalty to the leader.^[96] According to the accounts of refugees who have been recruited to mass gymnastics, the collectivist principle has been nurtured through physical punishment such as beatings and more importantly the organization of recruits into small units, whose performances were held accountable by larger units.^[97] The Festival's ritual components of collectivism serve to reinforce a "certain structure of sociality and affect", establishing Kim Il Sung as the "Father" in both the body and psyche of the performers.^[96]

Familism

Charles K. Armstrong argues that familism has transformed itself into a kind of political religion in the form of *Juche*. With the emergence of *Juche* as North Korea's guiding political principle since the 1960s, the familial relationship within the micro-family unit has been translated into a national, macro-unit with Kim Il-sung representing the father figure and the North Korean people representing his children. *Juche* is thus based on the language of family relationships with its East Asian or neo-Confucian "resonances of filial piety and maternal love".^[98]

Armstrong also notes that North Korea has actually transferred the "filial piety of nationalism in the family of the leader himself" by positioning Kim Il-sung as the universal patriarch.^[99] He argues that while the official pursuit of the *Juche* ideology in the 1960s signaled North Korea's desire to separate from the "fraternity of international socialism", the ideology also replaced Stalin as the father figure with Kim Il-sung.^[100] In effect, North Korea's familial nationalism has supplanted the "rather abstract, class-oriented language of socialism with a more easily understandable and identifiable language of familial connections, love and obligations".^[101]

The cult of personality surrounding Kim expanded into a family cult when Kim Jong-il became the heir apparent after assuming important posts in the WPK and military in the early 1980s.^[102] Armstrong calls this a "family romance", which is a term Freud had used to describe "the neurotic replacement of a child's real parents with fantasy substitutes".^[103] Through the establishment of the North Korean family romance with the language, symbols, and rituals related to familism, Kim Il Sung has been consecrated even further posthumously as the Great Father.^[86]

Analysis and criticism

Juche has been described by critics as an ultranationalist^{[104][105]} ideology and a departure from Marxist–Leninist ideas.^[104] Shin Gi-wook argues that "there is no trace of Marxism–Leninism or the Stalinist notion of nationhood" in North Korea. Instead, the government stresses the importance of the Korean people's blood, soul and national traits, echoing earlier Korean nationalists such as Sin Chaeho, Yi

Kwangsu and Choe Namson.^[106] Brian Reynolds Myers argues that *Juche* has more in common with Japanese fascism than Marxism–Leninism.^[107] Some critics have gone further, arguing that *Juche* is "meaningless on logical and naturalistic grounds",^[108] and cannot be described as a true political ideology.^[109]

Several Western analysts, such as Robert E. Kelly, argue that *Juche* exists solely to protect the Kim family's monopoly over political power in North Korea.^[107] However, Brian Reynolds Myers dismisses the idea that *Juche* is North Korea's leading ideology, regarding its public exaltation as being designed to deceive foreigners. He argues that it exists to be praised and not actually read.^[110] Based on his own experiences living in North Korea, Felix Abt describes Myers' arguments as "shaky" and "questionable". Having seen the extent to which North Korean university students actually believe in *Juche*, Abt says it is "rather absurd" to describe the ideology as "window-dressing" for foreigners. He also questions how only three decades of Japanese occupation could simply upend the impact of "thousands of years" of history in Korea.^[52]

Charles K. Armstrong says that "North Korean communism would not only be quite distinctive from the Soviet model, it would in some respects turn Marxism–Leninism upside-down".^[111] The key differences are that the North Koreans place the primacy of ideology over materialism, retaining the vocabulary of family lineage and nationalism and giving it primacy over class struggle and supporting social distinction and hierarchy over classless society and egalitarianism.^[111] He concluded that North Korea may look "Stalinist in form", but that it was "nationalist in content".^[111] Derek Ford, by contrast, emphasizes the continuity between Marxism, Leninism, and *Juche*.^[112] Ford, however, has also credited North Korea's resilience after the collapse of the Soviet Union with the *Juche* ideology.^[113]

Suh Dae-sook argues that Kim Il-sung failed to explain the difference between socialist patriotism, which Kim stated that he supported, and nationalism, which Kim stated that he opposed. Suh also criticized Kim Il-sung's initial conceptualization of *Juche*, saying that he had failed to explain how Marxism–Leninism had been applied to Korean conditions.^[114]

See also

- Autarky
- Great man theory
- Ilminism
- Juche faction, a political faction within South Korea's student movements
- Kim Il-sung bibliography
- Kim Jong-il bibliography

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